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The effect of education on cohabitation of different cultures in antakya (antioch) and expectations of formal education

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Abstract

Antakya (Antioch) is one of the exemplary cities in which people of different religions and ethnic groups have managed to live together for centuries. Thus in this study it has been aimed to determine the opportunity of cohabitation despite the differences; the effect of education, especially education of religion on forming cohabitation; and its responsibilities to support this kind of a life. Education is an element that supports cohabitation and even lessens the hindrances between groups. Religious education is supposed to an obligation while there are various ideas about its place, position and contends.

Keywords: Religious Education, Culture, Multicultural Societies

We define culture as life style and value judgment of a society. In this case educations' function is transmission of culture and help to new generation to learn these value judgments and keep up with life style. As a result of this social duty, education is an integral part of the culture. (Güvenç: 2007)

Antakya has a special position about multiculturalism. In this area different ethnic backgrounds and beliefs live together with bond of brotherhood and tolerance for centuries. In multicultural societies it is important to live together and also important the effect of education and religious education on cohabitation. The aim of the research is to determine the educational base of multicultural and pacifist life in Antakya and expectations about this issue. They made a cohabitation culture and in this research we had questioned the role of education on the relationships different groups in Antakya. (Türk: 2010)

In order to carry out the research, people from different religions and races living around Antakya were negotiated with. The findings obtained were evaluated by being examined with the method of content analysis.

1. The Effect of Formal Education on Cohabitation in Antakya

Formal education is a systematic and corporate educational activity which handled in schools. (TDK: 1981) This educational activity conducted by state with specific purposes and isn't discriminated between race, religion or gender and provided for all member of society receive training in same educational environment.

The emphasis about bring together different ethnic backgrounds and beliefs is one of the most important role of formal education on cohabitation culture. Thus differences come together and people recognize each other.

P1 (Male, 28, University, Teacher, Turkish/Muslim-Sunni) stated the importance of bringing together differences the school environment and training in same class in this way: 'Having education in same environment is the most important factor to block social divergence. Differences aren't noticeable except religious education. The student doesn't feel singled out.'

P19 (Male, 30, Vocational High School, Imam, Turkish/Muslim-Sunni) approves to training same environment and he thinks this situation is a cultural richness: 'Education begins in the family and continues at school. At the school teachers knows this area have a multicultural structure and they tries not to injure anyone. I don't find students who have different religious and ethnic background share same class objectionable. This situation leads to cultural richness.'

One of the functions of education is preparing individuals to social life and to help to develop proper social roles. Because of that education has an important role on transporting social diversity to school, how an individual understand, accept and accommodate multicultural society which he/she live in.

P3 (Female, 47, high school, housewife, Turkish-Armenian, Christian-Orthodox) thinks school life teaches living with different beliefs and understandings. She mentions about her daughter and emphasizes contribution of school to use a common language for communication to differences: 'I and my friends didn't have any negation on school. School closers us to each other and makes easy to live together. My daughter is growing together other children and they have different religious or ethnic background. This is very important to my daughter because in this way she is learning live together with different cultures. At the same time the school trains us about common language.'

Participants emphasize the importance of formal education on accepting differences and learning live with them. **P5** and **P2** expressed their idea similar ground:

P5 (Male, 43, primary school, hairdresser, Arabic, Christian-Orthodox); 'The school environment gives us an opportunity to know other cultures more closely. I consider that my daughter training with different cultures in same class because we live in such an environment and she has to get used to it.'

P2 (Male, 41, secondary school, self-employment, Arabic, Christian-Orthodox); 'The education with different backgrounds hasn't any negative influence. Contrarily it has an important contribution on knowing each other and living together. My son should have train in multicultural school environment so he can keep up with this culture.'

P13 (Male, 60, High school, retired, Turkish, Muslim-Sunni) clarifies the issue with his life experience and emphasizes the importance of common education to create a common culture: 'Sharing same classes and desks with different religion or sect gives children a good influence about cohabitation. I don't find strange that my children share classroom with different religions, I think it must be so.'

P22 (Female, 36, secondary school, rest house employee, Arab, Christian-Orthodox) says; 'Problems about religious or ethnic diversity at school are rare cases. If there is such a problem like this the reason is stranger teachers' attitude: 'Differences wouldn't be a problem at school, teachers know students' religious or ethnic background and act accordingly. If there is a problem about diversity this stemmed from the teacher.'

P4 (Male, 60, primary school, farmer, Turkish, Muslim-Sunni) gives examples from his own life on this subject: 'School environment is very important for us. In the past there was no school in the near village Vakıflı, so they came to our village for school. We shared our desks, and now our friendship continues. Neither I nor my children have had any problems about diversity at school.'

P6 (Female, 45, University, Bank employee, Turkish, Christian-Orthodox) mentioned about her daughters' classmate and her family. Now two families have a strong friendship. 'Neither I nor my daughter aren't be excluded during our educational life. For example my daughters' classmate is an Alewi and now we are friends now.'

P10 (Male, 78, secondary school, farmer, Turkish-Armenian, Christian-Orthodox) stated the importance of school about meet differences: 'Our children have only Armenian friends in the village but at town they can make friends who have different beliefs. Firstly this is very good for civilization. It is important that people love each other and

children close to each other. We began to learn living together before school and this situation continues at school. People learn living together in family, at school and in social life. I think the higher education makes things better.

P8 (*Male, 57, secondary school, self-employment, Arab, Alewi*) thinks the education is very important factor to accept living together and express like this: ‘My family is well informed and it affects on my world view. They married sunnies or Turkish-Alewis. When I look at my family I see a synthesis of differences and this is entirely the results of education.’

2. Expectations from Formal Education

‘Even if the ways and the possibilities of the production and the delivery of information are various today, schools and education system still have a vital role. Because the schools are the incomparable institutions which transform information into performance’ (Oğuz & Yakar: 2007)

‘In every period, education system through schools carries out a lot of functions such as transferring culture heritage to the generations, making children socialize, making society aware of the importance and necessity of cooperation and collaboration and growing up qualified staff who are open to innovation and improvement. In order to achieve this, education system should modernize itself and in this process schools need to be regulative and coordinators institutions as well.’ (Balay: 2004)

In this part of our research, in order to transfer the feelings of tolerance and brotherhood to the next generations that is believed to keep many differences together and to maintain the culture of multi-ethnic and multi-religious cohabitation that they claim that it is available in Antakya the question of what your expectations from formal education is asked to the participants. When we consider the answers, it shows that the expectations are mostly from teachers and national Education System.

3. The Expectations from the National Education System

3 of the participants who think education is a government policy state their expectations in this connection. **P19** (*Male, 30, Vocational High School, Imam, Turkish/Muslim-Sunni*)’s statements upon the subject are like that ‘The school education should be clear. No one must feel obliged himself/herself to conceal his/her identity and this shouldn’t disturb anyone. People shouldn’t be judged according to their cultural and religious beliefs and behaviors. Because that one’s living his/her values and beliefs freely doesn’t harm anyone. In contrast, this teaches to behave in a tolerant way to everybody. If you respect to people you will be respected. By considering these explanations of **P19** (*Male, 30, Vocational High School, Imam, Turkish/Muslim-Sunni*); we can say that he/she emphasizes the necessity of the multicultural education policy.

P11 (*Male, 48, High school, Village Headman, Turkish-Armenian, Christian-Orthodox*) in his explanation where he states his expectations related to the national curriculum determined by National Education policy, mostly reflects his own sensitivities. ‘I have some expectations from NES for maintaining the tolerance culture. First of all we should forget all negative events occurred in past. We have lived in peace for a long time and schools should tell this reality our children because talking about negative things occurred in past doesn’t contribute to the next generations anymore.’

P1 (*Male, 28, University, Teacher, Turkish/Muslim-Sunni*), in his explanation on the point of contributing to the cohabitation culture, make some suggestions for the education of children from diverse groups at the same atmosphere. Here are his some suggestions; in the process of arranging the education calendar, the sensitivities of diverse groups-for example vacation times- can be taken into account. In schools it should be told that diversities are beauties and richness’s in a society and that to get on well with others and to live all together, not all the people need to share the same color, same nationalities same beliefs and values. In coming years in order to maintain this

peaceful and tolerant living atmosphere, students from diverse groups should be given chances to prepare some projects collaboratively.

4. The Expectations from Teachers

In the societies having a multicultural and multi religious structure, the education system loads teachers new roles and duties. It is hoped that teachers growing up as the citizens qualified enough to be able to teach the pupils socially frail and coming from diverse groups, to be able to solve the available quarrels in a peaceful manner, to respect others cultures and identities and to be well aware of their social responsibilities. (Balay: 2004)

Here are the statements of 3 participants upon their expectations from teachers in regard to supporting common life:

Whereas **P13** (*Male, 60, High school, retired, Turkish, Muslim-Sunni*) says that ‘Parents shouldn’t only an effect on children about discrimination but also teachers and educators should behave in the same way in order to maintain tolerance culture’, **P1** states that teachers are of primary importance to the issue. They should definitely avoid the attitudes that may lead to a preference among diverse groups.

P2 (*Male, 41, secondary school, self-employment, Arabic, Christian-Orthodox*) thinks that teachers should be sensitive to diversities in society and that their teaching methods that reflect their own view point’s may be a problem later. He says that in this point, ‘Teachers have a vital role. A teacher’s discriminating among the children and reflecting his own religious beliefs and point views upon his teaching may create a problem. Especially the teachers teaching in cities where many diverse groups live together like Antakya should be well aware of the situation and behave considerably sensitively.’

Conclusion

Because it gives the diverse groups the chance to be educated in the same atmosphere with the others **formal** education provides a chance to know each the better especially for the children who have never experienced or met a diversity in their family and street lives. For the participants it is important that their own children are educated with the children from diverse groups in the same atmosphere with the regard of their learning to live together with the others who think differently from them. Another role of formal education that makes their living together easy is that it forms a common language among the groups.

People in Antakya who are well aware of that culture is an identity that is gained through education give a great deal of importance to their children’s education and beginning from their parents they find all the atmospheres and processes in which children are in contact with their environment essential and valuable.

Education atmosphere makes children closer with each other and help them develop deep relations with one another. An increase in the rate of young people’s university education and as a consequence their leaving from their hometowns causes a considerable decrease in available limitations among the diversities even marrying with someone from another group isn’t a taboo any more.

However, the result appearing in the example of Antakya where many people from diverse groups live peacefully shows that education is not only a component that provides cohabitation but also it is a process that supports the available situation and is expected not to damage to it and the expectations from education are related to this idea accordingly.

Participants also emphasize that formal education particularly religion education in schools shouldn’t give any damage to their social structure in which any differences are found natural and usual by people.

P19’s statements; ‘... anyone shouldn’t be judged according to their cultural and religious beliefs and behaviors and they have the right to live their values freely.’ can be regarded as a demand for multicultural education.

P1 (*Male, 28, University, Teacher, Turkish/Muslim-Sunni*)’s suggestion upon the subject ‘In coming years, in order to maintain this peaceful and tolerant living atmosphere, the students from diverse groups should be given chances

to prepare some projects collaboratively.’ can be seen the expectation of making the individuals’ knowing each other better by experiencing the same things and thus their developing a warm atmosphere based on sincerity and trust possible.

In the issue of expectations from teachers, first of all it is pointed the necessity of the parents’ avoiding all kinds of attitudes and behaviors causing any discrimination in the children’s relations with the others. This point can be seen right and necessary when we consider that the first education source of a child is his/her family. After he has told about the role of parents in education, P13 saying that teachers should show the same interest in this issue as the parents do, expresses the necessity of this sensitivity’s being regarded and maintained by teachers.

P1’s statement; ‘Teachers should definitely avoid the attitudes that may lead to preference among diverse groups’, makes it clear that teachers ought to be conscious enough about the available diversities in the society where they live and avoid any kind of statements and attitudes which may direct the individuals to make a preference by demonstrating any of differences as a right and meaningful one.

Besides, the words of P2 ‘Teachers discriminating among children and reflecting his beliefs and values upon his teaching may create a problem later.’ shows that people in Antakya find it troublesome those teachers reflect their own beliefs and values on their teaching. To sum up, here is emphasized that teachers should avoid every kind of attitudes which lead to any discrimination among children by being aware of the others and every kind of teaching that imposes their own values and beliefs on the children.

The sample of Antakya reveals the necessity that the societies with multicultural structures must produce some other policies that will prevent every kind of discrimination caused by informal actions, instead just hoping to achieve this through formal education. Yet cohabitation is fictionalized to be learned only by learning the religious rituals of the groups in the point of intercultural and inter religious education. But in our sample, knowing the individual and experiencing the same things makes differences usual and supports cohabitation and formal education is expected not to destroy this compliance. So, as a final word, we can say that cohabitation should be provided through social policies and be supported by formal education.

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